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Grimoire

La Salle University Spring 1999 Volume 33



Grimoire

Foreword

The mere reality that you hold this book in your hands is due entirely to the dedication of La Salle students to the liberal arts. For four years, I have watched artists come through for *Grimoire*, supplying us with a body of literature and artwork from which to choose. In a world that often discourages introspection and expression, such artists are to be commended. I thank you for making my job colorful and worthwhile.

Another important group to thank is the staff with whom I have been privileged to work on this magazine. With your help, I have learned not only about producing a magazine such as this one, but also about working relationships and friendships. To those of you who will join me in bidding La Salle farewell on May 23, I wish you happiness and success in your future. For those who will carry *Grimoire* into the Twenty-First Century, my hopes for you include a faster computer, lots of submissions, and a senior year with a slow-motion button!

Michelle Dillin
Managing Editor
Grimoire

Table of Contents

Poetry

<i>Nightmare Before the Wedding Day</i>	Marina J. Petrowski	7
<i>The Heavy</i>	Amanda Innes	14
<i>Oblivion</i>	Sherella Gibbs	16
<i>Why Write?</i>	Caitlin Mahoney	18
<i>Solitude</i>	Joanne McTamney	19
<i>Rhythmic Song</i>	Alison McGowan	20
<i>The Last Letters of Private Rosenberg</i>	Alexander Groff	31
<i>Crosses Over the Shore</i>	Jennie Maslow	32
<i>Parker</i>	Susan Chernesky	33
<i>30-A</i>	Amanda Innes	34
<i>Dublin, 12:35 p.m.</i>	Marina J. Petrowski	36
<i>What a House Is</i>	Nick Scorza	38
<i>Garden</i>	Susan Chernesky	47
<i>Walking Home</i>	Nick Scorza	48
<i>Haiku from my Front Lawn #7</i>	A. R. Bossert III	50
<i>Haiku from my Front Lawn #8</i>	A. R. Bossert III	50
<i>If I Could Coast With Zeus</i>	Alexander Groff	59

Prose

<i>Slob Meet Saint</i>	Sean Ennis	8
<i>The Fallen World</i>	Susan Chernesky	21
<i>Stuck</i>	A. R. Bossert III	40
<i>Just by Breathing</i>	Beth Staples	52

Art

<i>Chimps</i>	A. R. Bossert III	17
<i>Untitled</i>	David Bohl	30
<i>Untitled</i>	Erin Higby	37
<i>Panda</i>	A. R. Bossert III	51
<i>Untitled</i>	Erin Higby	60

Cover Illustration: *Garden Statue* by David Bohl

Nightmare Before the Wedding Day

Yesterday I shivered
Sitting on an ice-cube,
And today I drown in a sea
Of melted chocolate.

Yesterday I sighed
Counting empty vases in the house,
And today my head is splitting
From the smell of orchids.

Yesterday I played
With my thumbs for hours,
And today I beg forgiveness
From all the time I killed.

The floral fog thickens.
A tea rose corsage tightens around my wrist, cutting the flow of blood.
A golden band slips over my discolored finger.
Hands in satin gloves drag me to the altar.
Round faces laugh, and kisses, kisses blowing from each angle, scorching
my skin.

With butterflies in my throat
I can't cry out:
Please, return me to the ice-cube!

Marina J. Petrowski

Slob Meet Saint

Sean Ennis

Reader Meet Text.

Things happen. And sometimes, even shit happens. There's no reason to get overly upset. But you do anyway. And sometimes people meet who really shouldn't. But then again, sometimes they do, and it's perfect. Things are tough.

Husband Meet Wife.

My friend, Mark, got married a few months ago, and, for some reason, I was convinced that something big was going to happen because of it. Like on a cosmic level. In a "they all lived happily ever after / young love saves the world" kind of way. "Saves the world from what?" you skeptics ask, and rightly so. I don't know. Racists? Income taxes? Yes. And no. Those things are just symptoms of a bigger problem. We all know the world needs saving. Don't play dumb.

It's just that "they all lived happily ever after" seemed vague enough to include not only the handsome groom and his lovely bride, but people like yours truly, as well. The happily-ever-after parasites.

The only reason I really bring it up is that I don't usually think things work like that. I surprised myself with that bit of optimism. Maybe that's what happens the first time one of your friends gets married.

Grace Meet Reluctance.

When I was in fifth grade, I was picked to give the welcoming address to the Bishop for our confirmation. I memorized a speech I did not write or understand, but the only thing I can remember anymore is the beginning: "Your Excellency..." That's how it started. And I'd have to give a little bow. Even in fifth grade, such a greeting seemed strangely medieval. Now, even more so.

But I rattled it off without a slip. My silly fifth grade voice microphoned and booming in the church. An ironic version of the voice of God. What really gets me is that this was probably the most anxious moment of my life, but for the Bishop, it was just another day at the office. Those kind of dynamics make me feel so crappy.

After what seemed like a half an hour, I found myself at the end of that terrible speech. I think I was having something of an out-of-body experience for the bulk of my performance, but when I hit the last paragraph, I came back together. Wrapped it up, and then reddened at the applause. He said, "Wow, that was quite a mouthful," and the congregation laughed, and I felt the sting of every vocabulary word I didn't understand in that stupid speech.

Beer Meet Bone

And I've been thinking a lot about this joke I heard. It goes, "A skeleton walks into a bar. Orders a beer and a mop."

I thought it was funny when I first heard it, but it has become less of a joke for me and more like a short film. Of course, you would have to grant the director a certain amount of liberties. "Suspended disbelief," that's what they call it in film class. I couldn't think of a worse thing to ask someone to do, but Christ, it's in the textbook, so it must be legitimate.

Anyway, I see the door opening, and he hangs up his black trench coat where the other, flesh-covered, patrons have. The darkness and the smoke of the bar serve magically as his missing ligaments and muscles as he glides across the screen. His frame seems fragile but his movements are fluid and silent. Not like bones rattling and banging and chipping into each other. But it's too dark to be sure that it's real.

When he gets to the bar, he makes his order. His voice isn't deep like he was Death or somebody like that. I imagine it sort of surprisingly high pitched, pulled tight like a young man's, and the bartender seems more surprised at the voice than at the skeleton itself. There is a close-up of the beer as it arrives. His bony fingers clink against the glass as they wrap around it. The camera follows the arm to the mouth. The beer passes between the jaw, splashes down the vertebra in the neck, drenches the rib cage and then his hips and the stool. A puddle collects below his seat as he finishes his drink.

Then he pushes his stool away from the bar, and steps wide to avoid the mess. He grabs the mop out of the bucket and gets to work. He knew this would happen and he's prepared for it. His frame has a golden tinge to it. He'd whistle if he had lips, for Christ's sake.

Friendship Meet Addiction.

Last summer, before he got married, Mark asked me to help him stop smoking. We were about to do some traveling together, so we would be around each other all the time, and I could easily monitor his habit. He handed me his pack of cigarettes, and I was instructed to give him one a day.

"Even if I beg and scream and yell, don't give me more than one. Do not."

"Ok, ok," I said as put the cigarettes in my backpack. "I'm going to enjoy this."

I think by the first stop we made in Jersey, Mark had already bought a secret, supplemental pack of cigarettes. I said nothing, feigned ignorance. By the time we got to North Carolina, he was making deals with me. And I'd reluctantly unzip my bag and shake my head at him, while he rationalized and confessed and promised to repent.

"It's just that I'm away from Karen, and the stress of the trip, and I know I told you not to do this under any circumstances, but, I mean, they are my cigarettes, and I won't smoke at all tomorrow." All of this wasn't necessary. I would have given it to him anyway. I'm not his mother; I'm his friend, and there's a big difference. A mother is a champion of health, a friend, of desire. And, my gosh, the guilt he seemed to be wrestling with was really ugly to witness. I'd give him the whole damn pack to keep him from squirming like that.

Monk Meet Shrink.

So here's another idea for a movie. I think people will love it.

What if I told you that, having been so intrigued with the human invention of psychoanalysis, God thought it might prove interesting to subject some of his best men to this sort of investigation? Would you believe me? Oh hell, it doesn't matter. Suspend that goddamn disbelief. Hang it from the rafters. Just remember how to get it down. Lights, camera, action.

Understandably disoriented after traveling across time and space so abruptly, Saint Benedict arrived in the doctor's waiting room with a great deal of screaming. He had been pulled out of his cave in Subiaco, Italy and into a New York skyscraper, not to mention booted across 1500 hundred years, by a divine, but ungente hand. So when the receptionist, a youngish girl with milky white skin and a painted face, came from behind her desk to see what the problem was, Benedict began stripping and banging his head against the coffee table. *Cat Fancy* and *New Yorker* magazines were sent flailing in the melee.

Later, after Benedict regained some of his saintly composure, the doctor began his interview. As mentioned earlier, God had his/her hand in this escapade, so there was no problem of translation (à la Pentecost, see Acts 2:1-13). But the two still had some difficulty understanding each other on, perhaps, a more basic level:

"So tell me," the doctor started, pen in hand, "Why did you start taking off your clothes and banging your head in the waiting room?"

"The Temptor was trying to lure me with the fruits of the flesh."

"The Temptor? You mean Jennifer, our receptionist?"

"Yes."

"Well, I don't think she was trying to lead you to sin as much she was trying to get you to fill out some insurance paperwork. It's standard procedure."

(At this point, I'd like to stop the movie for a second. I am being a smart-ass here, and I admit it. I really have no business writing some sort of "Sexual Lives of the Saints," but I'd like to absolve myself by saying that stupid jokes shouldn't be interpreted as disrespect. I think a movie needs cheap comic relief. Especially this one. So forgive me, but laugh if you want to. You can shake your head while you do it if it makes you feel better...)

And it goes on like this for awhile. The condescending shrink. Gray Italian suit, sharp at its edges, legs crossed. Smelling nice but fake. The smug monk. A black, horsehair cassock, ripped, stitched, and ripped again. Smelling terrible but natural.

The psychologist had wanted to pin some sort of sexual dysfunction on our Saint the moment he walked into his office. He brags to his friends' wives over drinks, "I can tell a premature ejaculator before their butt hits my couch. Ha. Ha." And they giggle and wink at their husbands, and their husbands turn a little red. Laugh nervously. Avoid suspicion.

But back to Benedict. He wasn't falling into place the way the doctor thought he would. For one thing, Benedict didn't seem to want to talk about sex. Also, our Saint seemed so self-assured, the shrink was confused. The monk didn't joke, wasn't nervous. He answered the questions, and nothing more. He looked quizzically at the painting of a suspension bridge on the wall across from him. Never seen one of them before.

The doctor becomes impatient; loses interest in the miracles Benedict had performed, or the beatific visions he had experienced; stops taking notes. And he sure as hell didn't want to hear about day-to-day life in the cave. The shrink wanted to hear about sex, and so he pushed and pushed until he finally got a story.

And it was a doozy. It made the shrink's mouth water like Pavlov's dogs. Here it goes. A flashback.

A black bird had appeared at our Saint's cave, but it was more than a just a bird. It was a herald of evil. We'll indicate this fact with some ominous music, low strings, perhaps some lightning. But when the bird left, Benedict had been gripped with the most intense sexual desire he had ever experienced. Teeth clenched, eyes bright. He pined for a woman he had known before he became a hermit. A long time ago. Her eyes had been dark like the depths of his cave, but different. She smelled like olive oil. Her hands were soft, and that fact had amazed Benedict. No one's hands were soft back then.

And so for a moment, our Saint had lurched towards the mouth of his cave. Blue skies. Rich Mediterranean wine. Color television. Breakfast in bed. Bottles of corrective neurotransmitters...

And Benedict did step from his cave. Who would blame him really? But this is where it gets weird. He didn't buy a dozen roses and hail a cab to get the hell out of Subiaco. Instead, he removed his cassock, and threw himself in a thorn bush. Rolled around until any notion of sexual pleasure was obliterated. (How long would that take, I wonder?) The demon had left him, and Benedict was never troubled with such matters again.

Our Saint was quite proud of himself and the shrink was beside himself, ripe with diagnosis.

Suddenly Jennifer, the receptionist, or the Temptor, depending upon whom you ask, would burst into office, announcing that the building had been

taken over by terrorists. The monk and the shrink would look at each other knowingly, an unlikely but capable duo. I haven't worked out all the details, but I know at the end of the film there would be an elaborate speedboat chase. After our two boys had soundly won the day, for God and Freud and the U. S. of A, we'd find them again, poolside in St. Croix, gripping globes of brandy.

They would slip back into their old roles, doctor and patient, and the shrink, a little tight, would finally inform Benedict about his initial diagnosis.

"I think what you've got is stress management problems...they might manifest themselves sexually, but they aren't sexual in nature."

"But," Benedict protests, "I don't have sex. I'm a monk. Remember?"

"Exactly," slurs Doc, "So where's all this guilt coming from?"

And roll those credits.

If the movie is done right, it will make Average Joe feel terrible for even taking a girl on a date, and it will also make all the psychologists in the room feel perverted and terrible for undermining the religious life. And then, just in case, I'd station someone outside the theatre to berate anyone who left their half-empty popcorn buckets on the floor below the seat. A crackley-voiced, oily-skinned virgin. "We have trashcans for that, you know!" he'd scream.

Me Meet Me.

But I've been thinking that someone who I'd really like to meet, besides Benedict, is a younger version of myself. I feel as though I have a lot to tell him. First thing I'd ask him to do is not to worry so much. "You lose sleep over the color of the pen you did your homework in. The people you are trying to please have no jurisdiction over you. You're just a kid."

And I'd bet he'd have some stuff to remind me of as well. I suspect Young me might tell Old me that he should be more careful with the direction of his worrying. "You treat people just like money sometimes. It's not right. Grow up."

At this point, Benedict would probably pipe in and suggest we live in a cave. But not in his cave, of course, because, boy, does that guy like his privacy.

Shame meet Contentment.

I really hate it when they put signs on homeless people downtown. Here's some crazy, spinning in circles on the corner, advertising \$.79 money orders or some other garbage, and he doesn't even care. He's in no position to do so. But Christ, the rest of us are. He's probably getting a meal out of the deal. Or a bottle of booze. But what do the rest of us get for our trouble? Nothing that we need, I suspect.

Love Meet Cancer.

So anyway, try and stay with me. After the wedding, we were all a little drunk on the steps outside the banquet hall. It was warm for October, and we were talking about love and feeling old about the subject. But really, we're still just kids. I sat down on the steps because I felt like I was going to throw up. The world became unfocused and spun, and I imagined myself as a groom. Still with problems, but different kinds of problems. And more importantly, real motivation. Not the shitty kind that most people have. Like shame. And guilt.

Any notion of magic about the ceremony was long gone by then. Immersed in the smoke of the complimentary cigars that we're all wielding like politicians. It was the same world. The only people saved that day were those two. And a lot of good that does the rest of us slobs.

And husband and wife are both back to smoking these days. Their attempt at quitting failed, no thanks to me I guess, and they decided it wasn't worth the trouble. Probably because it's different for them now. They light each other's cigarettes. Somehow it seems less cancerous.

The Heavy

It's the end of this world now
Old Lady Magdalene sits in her chair
Gatekeeper of the next
Thick black afro tresses, messy, rust rags sliver across each ridge,
muscle in her body.
She places them that way, in one fell swoop, she knows that one motion
makes everything as is
"So dear girl, ready for your move, sweet thing?
Time to go to, to dance to, to move to the next."

So I advance forward, but something
so heavy, so grand, so heavy, so grand
pulls me back from the next.
Every time my toe pulls its greatest strength to wriggle free from the
heavy
the whole rest of my body pulls me back a few steps.

She's laughing at me, aloud, real loud,
"What's wrong, sweetie? Something holding you back?"

I respond, "Not back, just away."

But now it hurts: pain that crawls
up my back, around my torso, across my stomach, over my breast
to wrap itself around my neck, my head, my heart

"It's your heavy, honey. He ain't quite letting go either. You ain't though.
You both doin' it. Yeah girl. You know, sugar."

By now I am sprawled out on the cloud,
my mouth inhaling thick white air, which frames my whole figure, comforts
tired me.
I am so tired now.

"Oh my big girl. Don't exhaust y'self."

So I don't. I let it all go.
No moving forward means no moving back.
So I just sit still, each muscle finally
relaxed, calmed, like a lake.

But it is night time,
so the lake has a reflection of the moon,
and that shimmers, moves, trembles,
so things aren't really unmoving.

It's the cloud's fault, it's tilting sideways
away from Old Lady Magdalene,
moving to and through angles that have never been invented before
and I'm sliding, falling down into this world that ended

"Not quite, old girl. You're so crazy if you think it's all over."
She's laughing so hard now and her horrendously large and beautiful smile
swallows up any effort to stay on the cloud and go, dance, move to the next.

So I fall.
But I am happy.
Because it's you.
You're so heavy.
"Oh my old girl, right where I want you to be. You're in the next."

Amanda Innes

Oblivion

Their laughter and happiness taunts me,
I envy their carefree demeanor.
Sometimes I long to live in their thoughtless world,
No worries, no insecurities—only jubilation.
They live in these tiny universes,
They have no desire to escape,
For they know reality is esoteric.
What do they know about life?
Will they ever learn?

Come into my world, I've been to yours.
I do not desire ignorance—only enlightenment,
For I know the smallest discrepancy can shatter your world.
Step into my realm, I've visited yours.
But I do not wish to be blind—I see all that is to be seen,
For I know your eyes are veiled, you cannot see truth.
Visit my universe, I've lived in yours.
But I do not want to be deaf—I hear every sound,
For I know your hearing is fine-tuned to the benevolence of the world.

I invite you to free yourself,
But caution is advised,
For once you enter reality,
You can never go back to your frivolous existence.

Sherella Gibbs



Chimps

(pencil and charcoal)

A. Raymond Bossert III

Why Write?

Ink has become my utensil
For thoughts to flow
Like a cascade of crystal water
My mind releases its power
Into my hand to write

Beauty escapes and rests on paper
To find it's everlasting home
Rhyme and rhythm connect
To express the depths of my soul
Words intertwine to create poetry

Unconscious ability to phrase
Born into my heart
Someday my life may be
Printed in a book for all
To cherish and understand

My poetry is a prize
It may need to be revised
Poetry is my expression
Of sorrow and joy
That everyone can relate

Caitlin Mahoney

Solitude

I sit in silence
Thoughts slowly sliding
Sickening my stomach
Simple memories of you

Sweet stolen kisses
Secret suggestive glances
Softest subtle touch

Salt-stained eyes
See my world
Solitary and Secluded
I sigh at the arrhythmic pattern
Sounding from a broken heart

Joanne McTamney

Rhythmic Song

Sun boosts up into a cloudless, spring
sky; its tepid rays pierce my shut eyelids.
Fragrance of honey-suckles breeze
through a fraying, screen window.
Wisps of hair tauntingly tickle my forehead.
I glide my sweaty palm across the lavender,
satin pillowcase, refreshingly cool against
my skin. Gently, I run my trembling
fingertips over your firm lips, and my
backhand slides across the stubble on your
once-smooth cheeks. I delicately press my ear
against your chest to hear my favorite
rhythmic song. As I lie listening to this
dulcet melody, you stir and envelop me
with firm forearms. Your aqua eyes
gaze profoundly through mine...
Perhaps I will experience a morning such
as this some day, but for now I just
glide my sweaty palm across the
lavender, satin pillowcase, but encounter
nothing except hollow air.

Alison McGowan

The Fallen World

Susan Chernesky

I turned sixteen during the summer of 1993. That was the summer that I had passed the driver's test, smoked my first cigarette, and cheated on my first boyfriend. That was the also the summer that I had started working at Videoland. It was my first job, and I loved making money. But I never saw my parents. Back then, my mother, Michelle, worked full-time as an administrative assistant for our school district and my dad, Joe, managed a Ford Dealership. I would be leaving for work as they would be getting home. I remember that we hardly ever ate dinner together that summer. I usually heated a frozen dinner, Country Pot Roast or something, before I left for Videoland. My father would cook for the two of them when he got home from work. He had planted a garden that summer, and he'd make enormous salads with homemade dressings.

I would see my mother for a half-hour in the afternoons. She would ask me where I would be going after work that night. I'd tell her that I was going out for coffee, or to my friend Billy's house. She would tell me that I was too young to drink coffee. And we would leave it at that.

The drive to the video store along Church Street was bleak at best. In the valley, the Wyoming Valley, miles of stripped land from mining lined the roads. Church Street was one of those barren strips; culm banks towered high into the sky with leafless trees sprouting from them year-round.

I pulled my mother's station wagon into the video store's lot. In the front window, a neon sign read *We Rent Nintendo*. Our video store was small, a mom-and-pop shop; though it was more like a pop-and-pop shop. My manager was Ron; his boss, the owner George, was his boyfriend. Ron was a skinny man in his thirties, with longish blond hair that he usually pulled back into a ponytail. George was much older and heavier than Ron. But they were a great couple, Ron and George, always going on weekend trips to the Poconos or taking yoga classes together.

When Ron was off, Dan was in charge. He was only twenty, and I had a crush on him. This was odd, because he was so short, only five-feet-seven. Later, in my twenties, I would fall in love with a man one inch shorter me. But at sixteen, I dismissed any guy under six feet because I was almost that height.

Walking through the aisles of movies toward the back, I saw Dan and Alyssa behind the counter. Alyssa was nineteen; she had gone to my high school, but I had never known her there. We had met on my first day of work, two weeks before. It was strange, really. When I had been a freshman, I had tried to learn the name and face of every senior. My girlfriends and I would sit around the table at lunch and dream of the time when we would sit in the "senior section."

But Alyssa had never been friends with those seniors, the popular ones, who sat there.

"Hey, kid." Dan was putting shrink wrap around used movies that we were going to sell for ten dollars.

"I'm not a kid, Danny."

Dan handed the movies to Alyssa and then looked at me. He had long, dark eyelashes that always seemed a little damp.

"Sure, you are. You're Kenny's little sister," he said, smiling.

Kenny had worked at Videoland when he was in college and for two years after that when he was looking for a teaching job. He'd finally landed one, at the private school in Kingston, teaching English and Journalism. But he'd hated it. He had stayed there for just a year and in the fall of my sophomore year of high school, he had started doing public relations for a record store chain called The Sound.

But when they had worked together, Kenny and Dan had been friends. Whenever I would go into the store with my mother to rent a video, I would notice Dan. He would always be hanging around Kenny, laughing at his jokes. It wasn't until after high school, when I'd heard that Dan had moved to Connecticut with some guy, that I had realized that he was gay. My high school crush had had a crush on my brother. I had never noticed, because everyone liked my brother. Kenny had always had girls and friends and girlfriends calling his house. A month before I had started working at the video store, Kenny had asked his girlfriend at the time, Beth, to marry him. She was pretty and blond and I never liked her. But my mother thought of Beth as a second daughter and she had booked a place for the reception two days after the engagement.

I punched into the time clock. "I may be a lot younger than Ken. But I'm not a kid."

"He's just giving you a hard time," Alyssa said. She smiled. Alyssa looked so pretty when she smiled; her blue eyes were bluer than my own, which were really gray.

I was already tired when I asked, "So, Danny-boy, what do you want me to do today?"

"Reshelf."

That was a Tuesday night. By nine, I was ready to leave even though the store closed at ten. But it had been slow that night, and I had vacuumed and washed the front windows by eight-thirty. I was reshelfing a copy of *Casablanca* when the telephone rang. Dan answered.

He looked at me and shook his head.

"No, there's no Sarah Zalonis here," Dan said.

I was Sarah Zalonis, standing two feet away from him.

"Yes, I'm sure. There's only a Sarah Allan."

"Dan," I said. "It's for me." He had never noticed that Kenny's last name was Allan and mine was Zalonis. Our mom had been married twice, once to Gary Allan and then to Joe Zalonis. When I picked up the telephone, I heard Alyssa explaining all of this to Dan.

"Sarah?"

"Yeah," I said. The voice was Adam's.

"We're still meeting at Billy's at ten."

"Coffee?"

"Coffee."

"Okay then. I'll see you soon," I said. Adam and I had had that same conversation a thousand times. We always met at Billy's before going out for coffee. But he called every time, just to make sure I'd show up.

I hung up the telephone and asked Dan if I could leave before ten. He said sure, and before I left, Dan apologized for getting my name wrong. I said it was okay; people made that mistake all the time.

Billy's house was in the new section of a housing development. His basement smelled like cigarettes and mildew. Nobody Important, Billy's and Adam's band, had just finished practicing. Adam's drum kit, with stickers pasted all over the bass drum, was set up in the corner. Adam was a much better drummer than he had been when I had first heard him play. That was a year before. My friend Anne had taken me to Billy's and someone was banging on the drums. I didn't know him then, but it was Adam. Billy introduced us and by the end of the night, Adam and I were inseparable. I may have loved him. Though, in my life, I've thought that I've loved many people.

That night, after I got off work and instead of coffee, we drove to the airport. Adam and I sat on the observation deck; we watched the planes come and go, happy that it was summer.

On Saturdays, my family tried to spend the afternoon together. Kenny would come over with his laundry and stay until after dinner. In the summer, we'd swim in our pool and listen to a baseball game on the radio. We would toss beach balls that sailed softly through the air in arcs of spinning color and Kenny would quiz me on the names and positions of the baseball players.

I was floating on a yellow raft with my eyes closed when Kenny jumped into the pool and flipped my raft over.

"Jesus, Ken," I said, when I emerged from under the water, blinded by chlorine. He was laughing, so I splashed him.

"Mom said that you got home late last night. She's pissed," he said.

"Why didn't she tell *me*?"

The raft that I had been using floated to Kenny, and he propped himself on it. "Because I'm telling you."

"And what are you going to say?" I said. I climbed out of the pool and sat on its edge with my feet dangling in the water. I sat back and closed my eyes.

"Well, you know, Dad will let you do just about anything."

My father was a free spirit. My mother was not.

"And?"

"And, so he won't tell you to get your ass home before one in the morning. You don't listen to Mom. So I'm telling you to be considerate and come home earlier," Kenny said. I heard a splash so I opened my eyes. Kenny was under the water and I sat there, on the deck of the pool, silent. I had gone to see Nobody Important the night before with Anne. Back then, she lived in an apartment with her mother, a nurse who worked the third shift at a hospital. Anne could come home anytime she wanted. After the show, we'd gone to a diner. I hadn't gotten home until almost two.

"Listen, Kenny," I said. "I don't mean to sound ungrateful. I appreciate your concern. I do. But I'm okay. We were just at a diner."

"I don't care where you were," Kenny said. "You're too young to be out to all hours. I'm only saying this because we worry about you."

"I know," I said and jumped back into the pool.

Dan was training Alyssa to be an assistant manager, so when Dan called in sick one Sunday and Ron was at the Mount Airy Lodge with George, Alyssa took over the store. I didn't know it then, but that would be that last time that we would work together. And the two of us had always had a good time working together, especially when guys would come in to rent porn. We'd laugh at them as they walked to the "adult video" back room. There were two types of men who rented porn. First, there were the guys who would never make eye contact with us, even when they were paying for their video. They'd place the movie title-side down on the checkout counter. Then there were the guys like Jason; he was eighteen. Jason just loved that he was old enough to rent it at all. He would walk into the store and come right over to Alyssa or I and ask, "Is *Sinderella* available tonight? Sinderella with an 'S'?"

Alyssa turned on the lights. "I'm glad that it's usually slow in the morning," she said.

"But you know that guy Tom will be in soon," I said. We laughed. The only people that ever came in before eleven were those who rented everyday. They were customers, like Tom, who kept a list of movies that they had not seen. Tom, a balding guy around fifty, marked new release dates in his daily planner.

"You were out late last night?" I said. Alyssa had dark circles under her eyes.

"I didn't go out but I was up half of the night," she said.

I guessed that her boyfriend Sam had come over when he'd gotten off work. He worked at George's other video store and went to school part-time at the community college in Nanticoke. It was a large, gray building in the run-down section of town.

"I haven't been feeling well, some kind of bug," Alyssa said. "I think I had a fever. I woke up sweating."

"How do you feel now?" I asked.

"Nauseous."

Without thinking, I said, "Maybe you're pregnant."

She placed her hand on her stomach. "Anything but that," she groaned.

When Billy's parents went away the third week of that July, he threw a party, a festival. Bill-Fest had been born the summer before, when Billy's parents had gone to Disney World for a week and took Andrew, his little brother, with them. Billy had decided not to go. The prospect of a week at home alone had been much more appealing than a week with Drewser. So Bill had created Bill-Fest, a three-day event of Nobody Important music, swimming and cooking out in the backyard. Bill thought that three days was a good length for the party; he prepared for two days before and cleaned up for two days after.

The afternoon of the first day of the second annual Bill-Fest, I told my father that I would be staying at Anne's house that night. He was in the yard, weeding my mother's flower garden, wearing white gardening gloves and a Yankees hat.

"And is Anne staying here?" he asked, sitting back on his feet. He took off one glove and wiped the sweat from his forehead.

I smiled at him. He knew that Anne and I would both be staying at Billy's that night.

"I think so."

"Just be careful," he said.

I bent over and kissed him on the cheek. "Don't worry," I said, though I knew he would. He put the stained glove back on and went back to weeding.

When I got to work that evening, Alyssa had called out sick. Ron said that she had the flu, maybe the same thing Dan had a few weeks earlier. Still, I wondered if it might be something else; it seemed like she had been tired for most of the summer. But Ron seemed to think it was the flu and guessed we'd all get it eventually.

By the time Anne and I arrived at Billy's house, the place was packed. We parked a block away; it was the only spot we could find, even though there were only two other houses on his street. Anne and I went through the front door, but we didn't knock. Inside, there were faces of people I knew, faces of people I had never seen before.

"Who are these people?" I said to Adam. We were making our way outside to Billy's backyard.

"I don't know," he said, laughing. "Some kids from our school told some kids from Wilkes-Barre who told some kids from Dallas, I guess."

"So the entire valley knows about Bill-Fest." I couldn't believe how many people were at his house, which was already a mess. Cups and empty pizza boxes covered the cherry-wood dining table.

"Where's Billy?" Anne asked. She and Billy dated sometimes. Half of the songs Billy had written were about her.

"He passed out an hour ago," Adam said, though this seemed to mean nothing to him. "He's been drinking Southern Comfort all day."

We sat down in the grass, surrounded by people. "Where did he get it?" I said.

"Some guy from DQ bought it for him," Adam said. Billy worked at the Dairy Queen. "And there's a keg of Rolling Rock in the garage."

Adam stood and grabbed my hands. He pulled me up and we walked into the garage. I found a sleeve of plastic cups and gave them to people in line for the keg.

About an hour later, Billy woke up and the band brought the instruments outside. Billy had told his neighbors about the party the morning before. They had said that they wouldn't mind the noise, and Bill had invited them over. Once the band started playing, Anne and I started dancing. With a cigarette in one hand, and a cup of beer in the other, I moved to the music. I had never smoked before, but somebody offered. The first time I inhaled, I coughed and it made me nauseous for a minute. So I let the rest of it just burn down.

"You're drunk," I said to Anne. She had just spilled her beer, and we stumbled to the keg to refill her cup.

"No, you're drunk," she said.

She was right. Anne refilled her beer, and we went back out onto the lawn. Nobody Important played a cover of Pearl Jam's *Alive*. I sang every word, and Anne sang, too. When they finished, Anne and I fell back into the grass and we stared at the night sky.

A guy wearing red sneakers walked over to us and asked, "Do you girls want another drink?"

"Yes," I said. "I definitely want another drink."

I woke up the next morning lying on the floor of Drew's room, looking at the glowing stars on the ceiling. I walked slowly downstairs, trying not to move my head. The clock on the microwave read eight-thirty, and the kitchen floor was covered in a thin layer of beer and mud. I found Adam sitting in the basement at his drums. His curly black hair was a mess, and his white tee shirt was stained from beer.

"Morning," I said.

Adam was silent, staring at the green shag carpet.

"What?" I asked.

"You kissed Jim last night," he said. I remembered standing behind the garage with Jim, Adam's cousin. How we had gotten there, I couldn't say. His breath had smelled like peppermint.

"Oh," I said. "Well, I barely remember it. But it probably happened."

"It definitely happened."

I sat down on the floor next to him. "You can't be mad, Adam. I was loaded."

"I'm mad, Sarah," Adam said, getting up from the drums. He stepped over my legs. "I'm really hungover and I'm really mad."

When I got home, I found Kenny sitting in our living room in the middle of the sofa. He was flipping through the channels, though the television was on mute. Both of my parents were at work.

"What are you doing here?" I asked. I still was wearing my Videoland shirt, which reeked of smoke.

"I'm glad you're home." He shut off the television. "Beth and I had a fight last night."

I was about to ask him what had happened when my mouth started to water. I rushed upstairs into our bathroom and threw up. Kenny followed me.

He knocked on the bathroom door. "Sarah, are you okay?"

"Go away, Ken." The last thing I needed was another talk.

A few minutes later, he came into the bathroom and sat on the edge of the tub. I was sitting on the floor, on the cold blue tile, in front of the toilet. He handed me a glass of fruit punch.

"Drink up," he said. "It's my fool-proof hangover cure."

I took it and drank slowly.

"Listen, you're too young to be drinking like this," he said. He handed me a washcloth so I could wipe my face. "You've got to be safe, you know, from boys and all that."

I set the washcloth down on the side of the bathtub. "I was just having fun."

"While you were having fun," he said, "Beth and I were breaking up."

I stood. "You're kidding." But strangely, I found myself pleased.

We went back to the living room. I collapsed on the couch, and he told me the story. It was a mutual decision, or so he said. Even though I had never liked Beth, I had never imagined Kenny's life without her. Later in my life, it would be strange to remember the time that Kenny was with Beth at all.

When the telephone rang early one morning in late August, I guessed that it was Anne. My family had just returned from a week at the beach, and I hadn't talked to her since before we left. But it was Ron on the phone. He asked me to come into the store sometime that day to pick up my paycheck and figure out a schedule. I'd only be working on the weekends once I started school.

When I got there, Ron looked like he had been crying. His eyes were blood-shot and puffy. He handed me the paycheck and said, "Sarah, Alyssa's sick."

"Again?"

"Not the flu," he said. "She's got leukemia. She's not coming back to work."

"What kind is it?" I asked. I had done a research paper on leukemia for my biology class, but I only remembered that leukemia could be either chronic or acute.

"What do you mean, *what kind*?"

"Well, there are different kinds," I said. But Ron had no idea. He only knew that she had already started chemotherapy.

I left the video store and drove to the Rite-Aid to buy school supplies. I picked up some pens, lined yellow paper and some white-out. But I couldn't decide on what color highlighter, and then I remembered that my father had already bought me a tablet. So I left without buying anything.

My last day at the video store was a few weeks later. I'd be taking the SAT's, and I joined the yearbook staff. We had meetings on Saturdays. But Ron understood and said that I could always come back in the summer. On my last day of work, we all signed a card to send Alyssa in the hospital.

Later that fall, I stopped by the video store to rent *Far and Away*. Ron told me that Alyssa would be having a bone marrow transplant. The surgery happened the day of our Homecoming Formal. Adam and I went together, though we had stopped dating. Anne and Billy got into a fight halfway through the night and ended up dancing with other people. Afterward, we all went to back to Billy's and hung out in the basement until the sunrise. I mentioned the surgery to them, but none of them knew who she was.

That was all a long time ago, before I had fallen in love, before I had left the valley. College had taken me away. I had gone to school at St. Edward's University in Austin, Texas. They had sent me a brochure and video in the mail after I had taken the SAT's. When I had applied to colleges, I had only picked those on the other side of the Mississippi River. St. Edward's, a school of about 3000, had offered me the most scholarship money, so I enrolled without ever visiting the campus. It was all accidental, but it was all permanent.

I had never been on a plane and I had never been to Texas. My parents had made the trip to St. Edward's with me that August, before my freshman year. We left a week before classes started and stayed at a Holiday Inn in downtown Austin. I was sick all week; I think that it was combination of spicy food and anxiety. When I moved into my dorm room, my mother cried. My father gave me a credit card. He had said, "Use it to buy a ticket home, whenever you feel like it. Even if it's just for one night."

During my freshman year, I had decided to double-major in education and English. Kenny had said that it was a bad idea. But I had stayed with it. And by the end of the first semester of senior year, I had already accepted a position to teach at a private Catholic high school in Austin.

When I came home for Christmas break of my senior year, Kenny picked me up at the airport with his little boy Eric, my godson. I had used my father's credit card to fly home on the day that Eric had been born. Kenny and Eric met me at the baggage claim. Kenny's wife, Amanda, was at home; she was pregnant again.

"You're so tan," Kenny said. I walked over and hugged him. With my boots on, I was as tall as he was.

"Texas," I said.

It was strange to be back in the valley and back at home. I hadn't been there in almost six months. I had spent the previous summer teaching at a camp on Lake Buchanan in the hill country of central Texas. On our days off, my friends and I would spend the day in the lake. I learned how to water-ski. Sometimes we'd stay on the gravelly shore all day, until the stars came out.

My parents were waiting for me when Kenny dropped me off at home. My mother asked if I liked the living room; they had re-decorated, and the carpet was gone. The sound of my cowboy boots on the hardwood floors echoed throughout the house, which smelled like garlic and baking bread. My father made spaghetti for dinner that night and we ate in the dining room, with Christmas music playing in the background.

The next morning, my mother called from work and asked if I could go out that afternoon and buy a Christmas tree. So I drove to Dundee Gardens and looked for a blue spruce that would fit in our living room. Couples and families with dogs surrounded me. And then I saw Alyssa. She was with some guy that I had never seen before, tossing a tree into the bed of a red pick-up truck. They walked around to the passenger side, and she climbed into the cab. They kissed before he closed her door. Alyssa's hair, which once fell in long waves, was short and straight. She looked old. I thought about saying something to her, when her boyfriend or husband went to the cashier's stand and she sat alone in the truck. But I couldn't find those five years in words. So I just stood silently, in the shadow of someone else's Christmas tree.



Untitled

(black and white photography)

David Bohl

The lost letters of Private Rosenberg

More paper goods of mine have numbly caught
The ebbing pulses of dead France's wind.
The April sun is cramped behind the moss
That shouts in pileous...viridescent... fizz...
I know not what, but probably about
How something dark has preyed upon the graves.

And men perambulate in sinking manner;
The look with all-but-not a Hebrew eye
At me, balled up against a cratered nook.
They feign bewilderment and stimuli.
With tongues abraded by spruced savagery
They have brash nerve to ask, "The hell you writing?"

I'd kick their brains about their doleful skulls
And dire understanding might then bleed.
But as it is, humanity is dull.
They see not on the banks of ruddy mud
My letters rended far by dismal force.
"Look there, look there!" But where's the soulfulness?
Just words in deaf and obvious submission.

Alexander Groff

Crosses Over the Shore

Have you seen them, the crosses,
erect like hand-crafted marble lilies in a field of green
green grass.

Row upon neat, organized, deadly row,
starched triangles of crosses ending in a line of heavy trees,
crosses like bleached-white hands reaching skyward,
reaching to heaven met with wet, bloody bodies,
reaching for help so long
long gone.

Have you walked the sandy-pebbled aisle-ways,
where underneath the announcement-poles
you hear "Taps" played at closing,
when all good people go home,
and all the dead continue to sleep
at sundown.

Have you tasted the silence in the crisp, late January air,
buttoned tighter your coat
(even though those with their coats, wet with the salty sea,
burned in the waves, burned in the summer heat, burned until
shot down)

and faced the unending pathways around which,
fading with the flat unearthly light,
lie thousands of bones with a cross or a star
or an anonymous phrase to assure safe passage
in death.

Have you tread your feet past dead grey concrete bunkers,
surrounded by remnants of metal, the greying lines of ghost-wire,
stripped and washed clean of blood by the common winter rain,
stripped and almost as bare
as the crosses.

Have you stood at the brink of craters in the living earth,
explosives waiting for a wayward foot to fall,
dirt and mud and stone statues at the Pointe,
where a rock lies heavy at the bottom of
the sea.

Did you wait for the sky to fall to black before you cried?
For in the ocean-wide night you can no longer see the whiteness
of the crosses
above the Normandy shore.

Jennie Maslow

Parker

And Bird's crazy
genius, a blend
of heroin and natural
ability, sings, soars
flies —
high into improvisation.
Erratic yet smooth music,
making melodies original
to that stage —
in New York City,
in 1949 —
gliding miles with Miles.

Susan Chernesky

30-A

When you're in a plane
at 8:59 p.m.
from Denver to D.C.
and the night is so black
the lights of each city shine back
stealing the form and beauty of every constellation above

So the place that you wanted to escape to: the sky's constellations
are now down below
where you were
and all that time you wanted to fly to a place,
to be among stars' beauty and wonder and peace,
where you've always been

Orion's Belt comes closer, closer
and proves to be street lamps on Kilmer Street

When you're in a plane
at 9:02 p.m.
from Denver to D.C.
the pin-stripe suited man in 30-B
reads each syllable of the Post
as if he were too grounded in earth
chest-high in soil
no mind to the sky and above

He shows you how to kiss
every tiremark
and examine the trail of
every ant
he's too close to earth, bound by blades of grass
no mind to every constellation in the sky,
on the ground

But when you're in a plane
at 9:03 p.m.
from Denver to D.C.
there's a glassy-eyed lady in 30-C
who falls into her romance novel
whispering, floating thoughts of the place where she'd like to be:

strapped to a comet, moving far away
too far away to see the beauty and wonder and peace
of every constellation in the sky,
on the ground

When you're in a trance
at 3:18 a.m.
from the Monument to the Pool
and the morn is so confusing gray
the dimming lights of the city
remind you of Toni Morrison's Mr. Robert Smith
who tried to go to the sky
but went to the earth instead

Amanda Innes

DUBLIN. 12:35 P.M.

(For Walter N.)

I like the smell of dusty Dublin inns,
Of wooden tables soaked in ale and stout.
The freckled waitress slowly leans and grins
At sleepy boys who stumble in and out.

Somebody groans and curses through his teeth—
I would not dare to turn around and look.
My coat grows stiff, I shiver underneath
And nail my eyes to letters in the book.

And for eleventh time this week it rains,
The sky drops lower, and the Heaven draws near.
My shoulders slouch, while all my thoughts and pains
Dissolve in faint sighs, like froth on beer.

Marina J. Petrowski



Untitled

(black and white photography)

Erin Higby

What a House Is

Harlan, Kentucky 1999

The carpenter wears
No gloves
He balances precariously
On cinderblocks, pulling nails

Nails in the wall are
Broad and flat
Like slimy mushroom caps
We have better nails
For building sets
In the theater

Our carpenter can
Hammer nails in
3 quick strokes

The siding peels off
Like sunburnt skin,
Beneath the wood is pale
And home to little
Clumps of ladybugs
Huddled against the cold
Beneath the pale wood
Is dark wood
And dust
And I look closely
To see if under that
I can see what
A house is

Inside Mr. Lundy
Sits in an easy chair
And strokes the dog
At his feet
He smiles like a boy and gestures
With his hands
And I can't understand him

But I smile anyway
Because I see warmth
Behind his eyes
Mrs. Lundy says
Come in come in
And her side door
Opens on the nothing
We're still building
They have four walls
A little box like all the
Others in a lake of mud
And the coal train
Rolls by just
Feet away
But they're asking us in
To what a house is

Nick Scorza

Stuck

A. Raymond Bossert III

We are El Seis. That is what Pedro calls us, at least. He's in charge, being the oldest. His shirt is sleeveless. He's got three parallel scars on his left arm. We are sometimes more and sometimes less than the number six. But the extras, he says, are not really part of the group. They come and go. Disappear. Sometimes reappear. Though El Seis are not permanent either. Gustavo left us two months ago. Arrested. Sometimes at night, we would sneak along the walls of Haltillo detention center and call him names for getting caught. Ask him when he was allowed to come and play. It wasn't until three days after that we found out his cell was empty.

The park is ours. Or so Pedro says. Not like anyone has ever tried to take it from us. Once we almost got run out by a pack of perros. Hellhounds. Tore up Lorca pretty good, he's the one with the bite out his ear. Only la policia sometimes makes us move. Then we hang out under the new Beltway. Yeah, Tegucigalpa has a new Beltway. Vamos lugares, baby.

God I hate the morning. I wake up cold and wet, and the bottom of my back hurts like hell until I pee, and you have to check for lizards. One time I had a little lizard crawl up my pants and get squashed. Tom says they'll crawl in your crack if you don't watch yourself.

Our park has a couple of trees, and a lot of trash. Sometimes I find a plastic wrapper I can lick some chocolate or grease from, but I don't like to do that in front of the others. Am I embarrassed? I don't want any of them figuring out my trick.

I've got to find my jar, hombre...

Jorge keeps trying to steal everybody else's. He's got to keep his hands to himself, or one of the chicos is going to teach him. He's probably what we would call number six of El Seis. We think he's a little different. Maybe he just likes his glue more than las chicas, who knows, huh? Can't blame him that much. Some of the guys were a little worried about me for a while...I told them I wanted the hardware store guy's daughter, and they thought I was just trying to hide it. Oh, hombre, she is only twelve, but I would slit your throat if it would get my hands on her chest. But the hardware store guy keeps a better eye on her than his glue...maybe that's why I always get away with it. I always waited for the days she was helping. The other guys get too greedy, and have to use their feet when their eyes could do all the work for them.

Come on, help me find my jar will you...hey, you got some?

Didn't think so, hombre.

I still haven't gotten that little one yet. But one time we found a couple in our park. What were they doing there? We took care of the guy, then the girl. I guess that wasn't how I expected the first to be...but I didn't want them to think me and Jorge were amoradas, you know. Manuelito felt really mal about the thing afterwards. He's the one who keeps saying that "Jesus is coming for us. Jesus will save us." And he believes it. Jorge used to tease him, but Pedro set him straight with a kick to the chest. Sometimes, when Manuelito has some real good glue, he'll have a rosary in his right hand, the Marias echoing out of his glass jar, giving him a deep voice like a man.

Here's my jar!

I prefer it from the jar, hombre. Little Mickey, see him over there in the Mickey Mouse shirt? Pedro trained little Mickey on the bags. When I'm conscious enough, I laugh every time I see him breathing that bag, in and out, swelling up like a balloon and then shrivelling against his little puffy face. He looks like a frog croaking with his throat bubbling in and out. Tom keeps trying to give Mickey another shirt to wear. Tom came from Florida, his dad was, what did he call it "exported." He blabs in English a lot when he is deep into glue. We keep asking him about all the stuff he had...Nintendo, permit for driving, cd player...but you got to remember, at least down here, no school. Anyway, Mickey only five, youngest El Seis, and Pedro's got him bags. They're easier for him to hold than the jar. He tries fit bag over whole face. Quick learner. Anoche, we pull him down from lamp roto. He must have climbed tres meter before lo vemos. His bag slipped out el mano, he diciendo "Quiero que muerta ahora, queiro que muerta ahora." Cuando no tengo Resistol, me sienta el mismo...Pero, no puedas comprenderme. No puedas conocerme.

You again, hombre?

How you know we were going to the dump, huh?

Smells pretty bad, eh? Makes you want to puke, huh? It reminds me of fish, hombre...we're in one big fishy valley. Like a fish was splattered in my face and its guts are trickling down my nose. Maybe that's just the feeling you get when you breath in bugs. Gross, huh? I hate this smell...makes me want the sweet glue... like brown honey, but with a chemically bite to it, you know what I am saying? But we need our hands free here, before the other boys and girls find out the dumping is early today. Maybe we get lucky today. Find some candy. Find something we can sell, like shoes, or a watch. Find some glue. Oh, yeah. I once found a whole unopened jar, hombre. Lasted me almost a week. I shared some with Pedro, though. He's the boss. He's sixteen. I'm getting a little worried about him though....no, not like that, hombre. He uses his glue for Maria...He says she's

his girlfriend, but she's just a fourteen-year-old whore. Juan has been sneaking off with her now and then, even though she is off limits. He's the one with the black beisbol cap...X-feelays. For just five minutes with his bag, she'll let him stick el mano down her pantalones or up her TAZ shirt...I've seen the devil with one roving lazy eye. Sometimes, when I'm running low, I think about giving that hardware store girl a huge vat of glue and all the things she will let me do to her for that...only, she probably doesn't need to sniff...

There's the truck, I better hurry...glass and plastic keeps getting stuck in my feet...I hate that...but...wait a second...There she is...the demon. Up on that rubbish pile. She has the face and the body like one of those cardboard cutouts of American girls they prop up around beer tiendas. You know, Lorca one time tried to make love with one of those cutouts. Scraped himself horrible, hombre. I wouldn't want no paper cut there. But this demon is totally naked...but not really, because you can't see anything on her. She's got big breasts but doesn't have any nipples or anything else. I'm not supposed to look, the chicos say so. But, how could I not? And she has two wide leathery wings like a bat, when she spreads them like now you can see the veins shooting through them like branches of a tree. She is rubia and her red lips sparkle even from over here. Everyone else has gotten ahead of me...they are going to get all the good stuff...but she looks so triste, crouching on la montanya de basura. I wish we had found her in the park, instead of that girl...but I don't know where I could put myself...there's nothing there but closed up skin, hombre. I leave the others to go talk to her. Pedro said that talking to her was completely forbidden. They won't know. I'll tell them I fell.

She does not see me until I am level with her pale feet...light hair blows along her shining legs. My hand seems negro when it reaches towards her.

"Why do you look so sad?" I ask her.

But she looks up at me under her brow with these two dark blue eyes that seem to have little lights swirling in them. Her blonde hair blows in the stench.

By the end of the week, we all run out of glue. Our stomachs cramp. We realize how hungry we all are. Tom and Juan start fighting with each other. The rest of us wrestle. Mickey just cries the whole day. "If we were girls, we could get glue," Jorge says at one point. We all grow silent. Lorca and me stop roughhousing right away. Pedro commands we break up, try to pick some cash out of pockets, and meet back here later. Was that a slur in his voice? Pedro has begun to limp in the past week. Juan says its the glue. It's blowing out nuestras mentes. Jorge warns me that he saw me talking to the demon. I'm afraid of what he wants in return for keeping quiet, but he never brings it up again.

I hang out around a McDonald's most of the day. I don't have any luck at that place. Their eyes were on me. All their eyes. Even those who didn't stare when I saw them, I caught their eyes move away. At one point a group of chicas sat at a table near where I was waiting. They wore clean clothes.

"¡Uy, que feo! ¡Que aroma!"

I wanted to stick them with my knife, but instead, I decide to wait outside.

There was a fat bald man who kept dribbling biege goo on his chin. I wanted so bad to punch him in the face and grab that hamburguesa. Good for him I was on the outside of the glass. Sitting there was an agony. I was alone on the street. I tried to beg. Sometimes that works for me. I'm still young, and a white-faced tourist sometimes feels bad. But not today. All locals. And my stomach churns. Pangs. I want my glue. Every second feels like something stings inside, like the lizard has crawled its way up into my stomach and is clawing around, trying to scrape up a meal out of my scrawny intestines which have nothing to offer because I've had nothing to eat because when you sniff glue you don't have to feel things like a stomach growling or your tongue salivating or even the grime and filth that cakes itself over the cracks in your skin or the breaking of scabby lips or the itching of rashes or the burning when you whiz on a tree or the feeling of a fist in your jaw or the plastic wrappers and rusty car parts that always fill up a space in your eye or the constant stink of your own pee and crap and rotten breath or the fear of the loud blam of los pistoles de la policia or the strange looks from men or the hard ground on my back which reminds me of soft beds, bedsheets, and a pair of hands that glide me into a bed and a pair of lips that press my forehead for just the right length of time and the low voice wishing me to sleep well...a warm darkness which covered me safely...unlike the stifling bustling, noisy blackness which nighttime has brought me now, the scowls and eyes looking down, half circles cut across the bottom, whiteness visible above the iris like an angry father's glaring.

Two Volkswagon beetles collide, and a crowd forms around them. This is my chance, while they are distracted...But then I feel something hit my head, like rain. I reach up on my head, I find a patch of wetness. Spit. My heart pounds, things look redder. I don't want to fight here, in front of adults. Cops might come. I feel it again. This better be Lorca playing a prank. I look up in time to see a pair of yellow-reflecting legs and the spiny tips of wings pass behind the glowing arches of McDonald's. I hurry down an alley beside the fast food restaurant. The stink in the alley is human urine, slightly less nauseating than the fishiness of the dump.

It is very dark down the alley, the light comes from behind me...I won't see it if somebody attacks me. But past the cardboard, and slop on the cement ground, she is crouched at a little dead end. A shimmering night-blue, shining silver hair draping over her eyes, her wings pressed along the ground in a circle around her. She raises her face, hair drifting to the sides, her mouth pouting and her eyebrows arcing in a frown.

"I'll sell you my soul," I offer. "I'll sell you my soul for some glue."

"I haven't any glue to give you." Her voice is soft, gentle. Breaking like small waves, a sound from a memory which I suddenly recall...a beach...Mama and Papa...hermanas...Yo tengo hermanas...

I can't help but ogle at her large, round, nippleless breasts. You can imagine what I'd like to do with them, hombre.

"We are being punished, you and I," she sighs. "Bad things only happen to bad people."

"What did I do?"

Her wings flap straight up. A smirk grows on her mouth. I realize she has fangs, like a vampire. "Do you know who I am?"

"No, *senorita*." I try not to look at her mouth. Those fangs make my back turn cold. I choose instead to look at her privateless crotch.

"I am Diablo's Hija."

I want to run, but where could I hide? Instead, I ask simply: "Are you going to hurt me?"

"We have committed the one sin God does not forgive. Being born who we are."

When El Seis becomes whole again at the park, Lorca is bleeding terribly from his ear, and his right eye has been gouged out, yellow and red glop has dripped on his cheek and splattered on his white USA shirt. La Policia. He had gotten caught stealing some bananas. I guess they didn't have room at the jail. Lucky for him. Mickey silently scrapes a sharp rock down his arm. Manuelito is on all fours, his rosary has broken and one of the Our Father's has rolled off. Jorge leans on the broken lamp post trying to get Tom to tell him about the pretty American girlfriends he had. I have a headache behind my eyes. I'm afraid of starving. And I'm afraid the police are going to come back for Lorca.

Pedro shows up last, limping alongside Maria. I sort of wonder why she was with him, considering we didn't have any glue. I wouldn't put it past the rest of us to have a hidden stash, but not Pedro.

"Maria is going to the hardware man," Pedro says.

We all look at each other.

"How can we trust her?" Jorge asks.

Pedro points a shaking finger, "You watch it."

"But, Pedro," Tom agreed. "What if he gives a hard time? What if he doesn't pay?"

Pedro's response comes in poco pieces, over about cinco frases. It was difical understanding him, but he explained that one of us would go along.

Juan jumps at the chance.

"No!" Pedro tries to respond, but isn't making any sense.

"Miguel," Maria says.

"Me?" I am scared. "What do I know about pimping?"

"He's never caught you stealing," Maria explains. "Any of the other of El Seis, and he'd suspect a robbery was at work."

"That's ridiculous," cries Tom. "He'd be suspicious either way! I say we give him what he wants and rob him."

Pedro somehow gathered himself, though his body still shook. "No robbery...la policia already looking for Lorca. Trust me. He'll fall for Miguel."

Pedro speaks. Nobody wants a kick to the jaw. He might be shaky, but even at his worst he fights better than the rest of us combined. We are just kids, what do you expect, hombre? Don't you think he's like a superhero, doing the impossible to keep his mente like that?

The hardware store had been closed for hours, so Maria and I climb the steps to the back porch of his apartment over the shop. Huge mosquitos dangle long legs around a lit bulb over the door. You might want to stand back, or you might get a bite. Sweat stings my eyes, and sawdust from his alleyway has clung to the little hairs on my arms, making me itchy. Is he married? What if his wife were to answer? Or his girl?

"This isn't going to work," I tell Maria.

"Miguel," says Maria. "Believe it or not I know it will."

I can see inside their kitchen through the screen door, it smells of fried beans, but looks relatively clean. An old refrigerator has a shiny chrome handle, and I can see a half eaten slice of bread on the table. My mouth waters. I feel like a peep. I hear a television...and her laugh. My stomach churns, I want to puke over the wooden railing. But what would I puke?

Maria knocks on the door, a strange pattern, the screen door rattling. He must have picked her up off the street sometime. El Seis has passed by strips of girls selling themselves on the street before. But they are looking for older men, and we are usually too stingy with our glue to compete with cash. I wonder what Pedro would think if he saw this red-handed, beer-bellied, graying man with his arm around Maria. As it is, I guess he wouldn't care much after all.

A wide shadow appears at the kitchen doorway, and suddenly his body fills the doorframe heading towards us. His stomach seems bigger than ever, bulging underneath his white tee-shirt like a steamroller, capable of flattening anything underneath. But, hombre, I don't want to think about him doing it. The rest of him is normal, maybe even too thin.

"Que," he grumbles, shifting light gray stubble across a dirt-black face, pimples with little scabs.

“¿Qué quiere esta noche, Usted?” Maria politely asked.

Dogs howl. Maybe the ones that attacked Lorca.

The man swivels his mass back into the house. “Papa will be back, niñita.”

Maria steps back as he walks between us and waddles his huge belly down the steps, swatting at mosquitos. The screen door slams shut, echoing down the street. He fumbles in his khaki shorts, and pulls out his keys. Maria and I follow him to the back door of his shop which he opens and enters. Turning on a light bulb, as if by magic, he is surrounded with gray tools with rough looking metal, wooden boards with splinters and sharp corners, rows of little cubby holes filled with glimmering screws and pinpoint nails.

“Entre, chico,” he commands.

“No, señor, I am only here to make sure you give her the glue,” I answer.

His eyes dart to Maria.

“Falso, Miguel,” Maria whispers. “I am here to make sure he gives *you* the glue.”

I love the smell of glue. Any kind of glue, hombre. But you can’t go wrong with Resistol...it’s my resistance to existence. I should tell that one to Mickey; it would make him laugh. Some people think, like Juan, that it’s frying my mente. Maybe that’s a good thing. I dream of baths in sticky glue. Swimming in a rubbery sea. That is the Heaven that awaits, when Manuelito’s Jesus comes. The feel of a brass lid just under my nose, a small strip of translucent yellow rubber crawling along my lips like snot...it’s so natural to me now, more than eating. I can understand how Jorge gets the same feeling from a jar as from a woman. That’s all it is with him. I can’t say it feels comfortable. It feels like nothing. Nothing. That’s opposite of existence, right? One day you’ve got an ear, the next day its gone. Vanished. Poof. Lorca is already on his way to being nothing...sniffing will take him to his lost ear, where he can just glue it back on. Some people come to us occasionally. They want to help us. They feel really bad for Tom, because they think he’s lost the most...well at least he had something to lose. They want us to stop sniffing glue. Why ruin the one thing that I like, hombre? They’ve made this new glue, you hear? It’s supposed to smell bad, keep us away from it...but when you’re killing your senses, hombre, your sense of smell don’t make no difference. Because glue isn’t really sticky, you know. Glue frees me.

Garden

Rusted iron gate swings open,
I hold him close to me, and we sway
under golden trees, dancing in our garden.

We twirl around while autumn
leaves cover my feet, and my baby boy
watches when the iron gate swings open

My mother calls from inside, "Listen,
to the thunder, it's going to rain," she says.
Worrying like she did when I played in the garden

Twenty-five years before, finding broken
things, keeping them in a box under my bed. Gray
clouds above, and the iron gate swings open.

Later, my mother and I talk in her kitchen.
Wooden fork and spoon hang on the wall, birthday
cards sit on the windowsill that looks out to the garden.

Outside, rain falls on the dying oak tree, a burden
to my father. He said it needed to be cut down last May.
But Mother told him she wants shade in her garden,
somewhere to lay the baby when the iron gates open.

Susan Chernesky

Walking Home

I could live here
For years
And never notice
The way the old tree
By the tennis courts
Looks at 3 in the morning
Street lights behind it
Like ghost lamps,
Balls of faintly glowing
Mist
Against a withered, black,
And solitary trunk
And the rain makes the
Street into glass
As it makes my shirt
Heavy and uncomfortable

My body howls for sleep
But there is so much yet
To do
So much
My problems come together
Like an atom
A cloud of little cares
Around a deep and densely packed
Wrong
The host of hell quartered
Inside, devils over demons
From the prodding imps of
Small assignments
All the way to the
Dark and withered flesh
Of the loneliest one

My Satan never tasted heaven
He never fell like a firecracker
Down to hell
He opened his eyes there
And saw heaven first
And ached for it

Never knowing
He grew planted in hell
A thousand arms reaching upward
Ghost lanterns
Shining at his back
And the rain made his
Heart into
Glass

Nick Scorza

Haiku from my front lawn

#7

Sing you birds. Buzz bees.
Fiddle me a tune, Cricket.
Car honks too loudly.

#8

Take cold stone seats while
Hovering green torches flash
Brighter than scant stars

A. Raymond Bossert III



Panda
for M.D.
(pencil)
A. Raymond Bossert III

Just By Breathing

Beth Staples

The first time it happened, it was morning, and Laura had been in the shower. She forgot how to wash her hair. She had squeezed the shampoo into her hand, a pearly glob just about the same size as every other morning. It was funny how you could sense things like that, the exact approximateness she cultivated over thousands of mornings just like this one. As she raised her hand to her hair though, something happened. She panicked. It was the strangest thing. She knew she wasn't supposed to be thinking about washing her hair. Instead, about what she was going to wear, or eat for breakfast. She should be reminding herself to buy stamps (her phone bill payment was late) or to make a dentist appointment since it had been well over six months since her last visit. But there she stood in the steaming water, fully conscious of only her hand in her hair, and she'd forgotten completely what to do. She threw aside the shower curtain and stepped, dripping, onto the cold floor. In the mirror she saw her hair, vaguely sudsy, and below it her face. "That is my face," she thought to herself. She watched it in the toothpaste speckled glass, thinking only that for several minutes, as goose bumps rose on her skin like water just beginning to boil.

That had been the first time. Lately, she had been having such moments with an alarming regularity. The other night, as she lay in bed, she somehow convinced herself that her eyes could not stay closed. The effort it took to force down her eyelids and hold them there was suddenly monumental. If her eyes stayed open, she knew, she would not sleep, and the idea of hours of wakeful darkness sent her flying out of bed to the kitchen. She thought she was going crazy. At times like this, she tried to appear normal, as if she had to fool some invisible judge of the insane who was watching from somewhere, ready to commit her. She warmed milk on the stove even though she hated warm milk, because that is what she believed normal people who couldn't sleep did. She put on music and tapped her foot against the carpet in the living room. People enjoying music tapped their feet. They snapped their fingers too, but she knew that was going too far. She grew weary of this, eventually, and stumbled back to the bedroom. In the morning, it had seemed like a bad dream, and she laughed as she removed the pan of congealed milk from the stove.

She tried to establish causal relationships between these moments of panic—environmental factors, time of day—but she could find none. She wanted fair warning, a wink, flashing mirrors, a far-off flare, some secret signal that would allow her to prepare herself, to think of an explanation. But it was always so sudden, her racing heartbeat, her vision like blurry snapshots, her breath like syrup, sliding slowly down the back of her throat, reaching her lungs, she felt, always just in time. These things, of course, made everything worse. Whatever it

was that caused them became a secondary concern. "My heart should not beat like this," she would think. And so it would beat faster.

Her immediate reaction was always to get away. She left an untouched McDonald's Value Meal on a table in the mall food court once. It had been the noise maybe, or all those people chewing, and before she knew it she was in the parking lot, no longer hungry, trying to remember how she had gotten there, and then where she had parked her car.

She felt like a different Laura now. She had crossed some invisible divide that she could not return from. She could not remember the way she used to think. She used to criticize things, everything. Tomato choosing methods at the supermarket, pedestrians who crossed on yellow, black belts with navy blue pants. No, that's not quite fair. She could be sympathetic at times. She always gave money to the homeless guy outside the train station. She cooed at tiny babies in the supermarket. She smiled at the elderly.

Now, everything made her sad or scared. She pictured herself with a tiny baby and she left her cart, half filled, in the middle of the supermarket aisle, brushing past the lines of impatient shoppers to get away. Something must have happened, a flick of some switch, to make her think this way. These glimpses of others' ordinary happiness made her feel stifled and trapped, leaving her to catch her breath with heavy spurts of frosty air in the dark night of lonely parking lots.

A few weeks ago it happened at work, with the other ladies at the office. They were all smoking outside, a circle of shoulder pads and heels and flashes of golden jewelry around the sand-filled ashtray. It was half-filled already, each cigarette butt bearing a lip print in a shade of red or pink. They could afford to do this. They worked in life insurance. They were all older than Laura and referred to her affectionately as 'The Intern' even though she had applied and was getting paid just like the rest of them. On this day, they had been talking about menopause.

"The other night at dinner," the one called Pat was saying, "I had a hot flash. Out of the blue. I rolled up my sleeves and started fanning myself with my napkin. My daughter was ready to dial 911, I think. 'It's just a hot flash' I said. She didn't know what to say. I didn't mean to scare her, of course. A simple fact of life. Imagine what she would have thought if I told her how I've been bleeding for three weeks straight!"

A cloud of exhaled smoke enveloped their laughter, as if they had all been holding their breath, waiting for this punch line. Laura was not laughing. A week ago, maybe. A week ago she would have gone in to email Janet the story, and that night, on the phone, their conversation would have been punctuated by feigned hot flashes at regular intervals. This week, Laura was scared. She did not want them to think of her as one of them. But it occurred to her that one day she could be. She used to feel separated from them by a distinctly solid line, but now it was beginning to look more like a perforation. There were captions, too.

"Before" and "After" or "Present" and "Future." She could not laugh, the cigarette smoke would hardly let her breathe. She was them, and they were her.

Laura sat in the Ambler Library, hunched over newspaper articles about asbestos. She had to write a paper about a place for her American Studies class, and she remembered hearing somewhere about Ambler's history as a booming industrial town, before the asbestos it produced began to coat the town in a lethal film of whitish dust. The first factories were built in the late 1800s. They gave hundreds of workers jobs, they turned Ambler into a town to be happy to live in, and they were making good things. Asbestos made insulation for houses, but also oven mitts, hot plates, brake pads. Things to protect, things to shield. Laura pictured the happy housewives all over Ambler in the early days, leaning over their steaming dishes and sniffing happily at the meal they had made, never suspecting that their oven mitt was harboring tiny toxins and releasing them into the air they were breathing.

She looked at newspaper pictures of the smiling workers, immigrants mostly, that lined the sides of the parade route honoring Ambler's anniversary in 1938. Ambler had an opera house then, before the VCR and 7-11. The workers had moved there to be happy, to have a better life, and no one ever thought of giving them face masks. It felt strange to look at their faces there, made up of blobs in black and white and shades of gray on the page. The longer she looked the stranger it all became, as if all their lives had been lived, all their pictures saved and placed in these dusty books for her to look at and sadly think, how ironic.

She started to feel suffocated in the library, the lights seemed to be playing tricks on her eyes and the ceiling fans kept catching the corners of her vision. She wondered if any asbestos lingered in the walls of the old building, seeping through the vents and covering the shelves in an invisible film. She knew its traces were long gone though. The librarians were old, but seemed healthy as they swished through the bookcases. It excited her for a moment, the idea of her breath sucking the white flecks into her lungs like magnets. For an instant, she wished for it, the external disease, an earned consequence, an actual affliction. She wanted to be one of the women in the photograph, in a frilly dress and feathered hat, walking down the street in flourishing Ambler, her lungs slowly and unknowingly breaking apart in indiscernible pieces, but smiling. Still smiling.

The man sitting across the table from her was called Roger. Janet had picked him out. He was nice, she said, and sometimes funny. Their standards,

like the corners of his eyes and mouth, seemed to be plummeting. He was not unattractive, although the restaurant was rather dark. She wondered if it was lit this way purposely, if the owners had stock in some condom company. It was the type of restaurant, too, whose walls were covered with strange signs, photographs, an old typewriter, a rusty sled. It was someone's job, Laura knew, to travel around and pick these things out at garage sales and thrift shops. Would that make her happy? She wondered what made Roger happy. She wondered if Roger would think she was crazy if she told him about her eyelids. She wondered what he would say if she told him she had to fart. She would not say these things, but she could.

A waitress was leading an old man with a walker to the table next to them. Roger and Laura both turned to look. He was alone, and it seemed like he was moving in slow motion. Laura felt like the room was getting smaller. He did not look unhappy, just hungry. His socks matched, Laura noticed, his shirt was clean, and he had shaved. There was nothing about him to make her stomach clench into this knot. But it wasn't about him at all. One day I will be old, Laura was thinking. I will not worry about getting a job, I will worry about crossing the street fast enough to not get hit. I will worry about bending over to pick things up. I will be scared of long flights of stairs. My body will forget how to work, it will collapse, it will attack itself. I will look backwards instead of forwards. I will forget things. I will be alone.

She was tired of thinking like this. She wanted desperately to get out of her own head. She imagined opening it up with a can opener and taking her brain out with tongs. She would take it somewhere very far away, a deserted ribbon of road where she would fling it out of her car window and drive off, her car turning suddenly into a red convertible with no seat belts. Or perhaps she would put it in a jar and donate it to science. Good luck, she would say. She wanted, she was trying, to think only about this conversation she was having with Roger. What was it? What had she just said? Something about a movie she had not seen. Why was she lying?

She felt like there was an invisible pane of glass between her and Roger, like at the bank, or the zoo. Like he was some creature that she was studying, but was not allowed to touch. This was not Roger's fault, of course. He was trying. He was saying the things you're supposed to in a situation like this. Now he was asking her about her linguini. 'What kind of sauce is it?', he wanted to know. She was saying, 'Clam sauce, would you like a taste?', but she was looking at the mark her thumb print had made on her fork. She imagined carrying this fork with her fingerprint down to the police station and having them scan it into their computer to find a match. What if it were that easy? 'Find me someone like me,' she would say and she would watch each new fingerprint slide over her own until it was nearly an oval of blackness. 'No match here', the officer would say every time, but he wouldn't need to, because it was echoing in her head. No match

here. She would write it on her napkin and stick it to this pane of glass for Roger to read.

In 1985, the Environmental Protection Agency was called in to do an official report on the asbestos problem in Ambler. Piles of dumped asbestos were building in parts of the town. People were calling them The White Hills, as if they were snow drifts or ski slopes, as if they were not what they were. When the wind blew, it carried the dust through the air and deposited it in tiny mounds on window panes and deck chairs. How could it have gone on for so long? The factory owners had known what they were doing. They finally made their workers wear masks in 1974, but still they let the piles grow. They were still there now, somewhere, covered over with grass and trees. There were maps but Laura could not get her bearings. They seemed cryptic, as if whoever made them was reluctant to admit this place actually existed.

On the map, Laura saw that the largest pile had been next to a playground, which the EPA had to eventually shut down. Laura tried to picture it, the children swinging on the swings, asbestos blowing from their hair and mittens like fairy dust. It seemed almost magical. And then their parents, so angry that someone had allowed this to happen. She imagined town meetings, parents united in a crowded room with seats like pews, their voices shrill, a gavel echoing. They suddenly knew each other. They all nodded approvingly when any one of them spoke. They turned and commented to whoever was sitting next to them. They drove home separately, but each lighted house saw the same things: washing machines filled with winter jackets and mittens; dining room tables littered with petitions, booklets, letters from and to township officials; worried whispers and the kissed foreheads of children in their beds.

Laura picked up her friend Janet from night classes on Tuesdays. Janet was a Women's Studies major and would sit in the passenger seat screaming and yelling about women's wages and incest or rape. She would cry sometimes, too, or roll down her window and yell at the men who passed them on the highway. She used words like "patriarchy" and "misogyny."

"The world is so fucked up," she yelled one night. "Today, some girl raised her hand and told the class how her mother was the president of her house. Do you believe it? Her dad is the first lady, she said. People laughed. It's so sick. It's like oppression is some foreign concept to these people, just because we don't wear corsets anymore. Or foot binding. Because her mom wears Keds, everything's okay."

Laura was smiling. This is what she did. If the woman wanted to be a housewife, that was not her problem. She envied Janet in a way, with this cause to rally behind. But it seemed too far removed from her own life to really upset her.

"What can you do, Janet? You live your life, and those people live theirs." Laura wondered if maybe she was oppressed. She didn't think so, but maybe she was too oppressed to realize it. She couldn't stick up for women because she disliked as many of them as she did men. It seemed to her like an oversimplification to fight for the whole of womankind simply because you were a part of it. She did not think used tampons were art, she thought they were gross.

"I just get so angry," Janet was saying. "People are so dumb sometimes."

This was why Laura and Janet were friends. They were accomplices in their mockery of the world. But while Janet got angry, driven to throw things and make scenes in shopping malls, Laura became detached and withdrawn. Finding fault with everyone made her feel terribly alone.

"Dumb, dumb, dumb," she said and turned up the radio.

After dropping Janet off, Laura drove back to her apartment. She decided to watch TV for a while. It comforted her sometimes, the illusion of people, their voices, their laughter. It was nice to listen without having to answer. She skipped over the news and found a sitcom about a family whose daily routine was for some reason supposed to interest and amuse her. She got up to make herself a cup of tea, and, when she came back, there was a bank commercial on.

"We got a loan, and now we have a house and a car," a smiling man was saying, his arm around his pretty wife. They had perfect teeth, too, and a golden retriever in the background.

"Now we're living the American dream," the wife said, and a voice began talking about interest rates and loan options.

It was beginning to occur to Laura that the things that made other people happy, the things that were supposed to make her happy, never would. It made her angry, too, the way those people at the bank pretended to know what she wanted. What she wanted was to take out a very large loan and reinvent the American dream, a product with an infallible guarantee of happiness. What would it look like? "Little white pills," Janet had said once. "Maybe you should see a psychologist." But the idea of pills scared her. She didn't like feeling that they were smarter than her. If her head hurt, she didn't want some little pill to convince her brain that it didn't. She wanted to know why her head hurt, and she wanted to be able to fix it. What she really wanted though, was to not hurt at all.

The most recent article Laura could find that mentioned asbestos told the story of a woman who had lived in Ambler her entire life. She had seen the piles of white eventually planted over with grass. She had watched the day they removed all of the playground equipment and tried their best to clean up the mess the factories had made. She picked up her children from school the day they closed it early. Her son had seen holes in the ceiling where they had slid the panels back. He wanted to know what was up there. And if she had told him, it would have seemed like nothing. Insulation, not monsters. He was not interested.

A few months ago the woman had gone to the doctor for a routine check-up and he had found a tumor in her lung the size of a grapefruit. It had been growing, he said, for years. The effects of asbestos on the lungs can take up to thirty years to fully develop, he had told her. How many times had he said this?

The woman was obviously upset at this point in the interview and began to yell at the reporter. What could she do? she had asked him. How could she not have known? It had been there all this time. Would it have been better never to find out? She had felt like clawing through her chest with her fingernails and pulling it out, she told him. She pictured it like a snowball, round and cool and indifferent.

This quote was reprinted under the photograph at the top of the page. The woman sat in her living room, with one manicured hand resting on the middle of her chest. There was an afghan on the sofa behind her; maybe she had knitted it herself. Laura wondered if it would be better for her not to have known. All her life now was this knowing, this eternal hand on her chest, her portrait of injustice captured forever on this yellowing page. If she had known earlier though, Laura thought, perhaps she would have done things differently. Perhaps she would have spent less time knitting. You couldn't blame her though, it wasn't her fault. But she had done it to herself, just by breathing.

If I Could Coast With Zeus

If I could coast with Zeus
Inside his rocky home
With halls nectarean and tiles slapped with loam
Accrued to little use,
I'd ask him why he smirks
At butchered blood and war, and other mortal quirks.
What gods on high are these?
In vile recreation
They drink at curvy seats in wicked self-libation
And chat as they well please,
At least till father Zeus
Discusses with that smirk more humanly abuse.
He'd ask if I might dine
With all his deathless pups.
A chair he'd offer me, but I'd refuse to sup.
He'd pour me out some wine,
And there with better tact
I'd down a bowl with him to feed my hollow act.
Eventually we'd watch
Some war; you know the type,
Where brains are stabbed and dashed, and hearts are splintered ripe.
It's when the peace is botched,
Along with hopes for rest,
I'd know that gods are bad, but godly booze is best.

Alexander Groff

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Grimoire



